

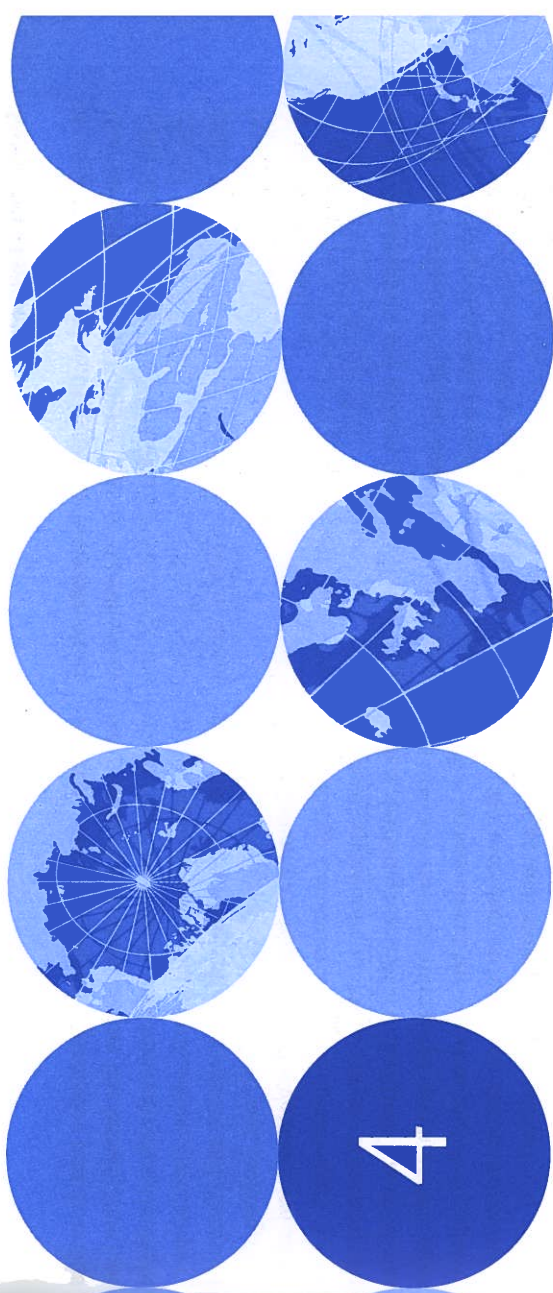
geographers' engagements with a diverse range of cultural texts, objects, phenomena and media: encompassing cartographic documents, contemporary fictions, policy discourses, autoethnographic diaries, musical and sporting performance, dance and performance art. In the process we outline the importance of everyday texts and performativity, more generally, for the work of cultural geographers. Finally, Chapter 8 extends some of the points made in Chapter 3 to consider the importance of **identities** and identity formation for the work of cultural geographers. We hope that, somewhere in this suite of chapters, you will find something that sparks your interest and prompts you to explore some of these topics in more detail: the lists of suggested readings at the end of each chapter should help you to find an area of cultural geography that interests you.

After reading Part 2, there are a number of activities which could help you to extend and develop your understanding of recent work in cultural geography.

- Return to the long list showing 'Cultural geography, 2009-10: from A to Z' in Box 1.4. Try to identify how the research topics in the table link to the broad themes – architecture, landscapes, texts, performance,

identities – we have introduced in this section. You could also take a look at the most recent edition of the academic journals *Social and Cultural Geography* or *Cultural Geographies*: choose the paper that sounds most interesting to you and, again, try to link it to the broad themes from this section of the book.

- Having read Chapters 7 and 8, think about how these discussions of **performativity** and **identity formation** extend and add complexity to the ideas of cultural production and consumption outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.
- Choose one of the broad themes – architecture, landscapes, texts, performance, identities – that we have introduced in Part 2, and bear this topic in mind as you take a look at the chapters in Part 3. In Part 3, we explore ideas of **everydayness** (Chapter 9), **materiality** (Chapter 10), **emotion** and **affect** (Chapter 11), **embodiment** (Chapter 12), and **spatiality** (Chapter 13). Consider how these concepts are relevant to the topic you have chosen. Try to identify some ways in which these concepts extend or complexify your understanding architecture, landscapes, texts, performance or identities.



Architectural geographies

Before you read this chapter . . .

- Take a moment to look around you. Think about where you are. We would anticipate that you are either in, or near, a building (or perhaps more than one). Focus upon one of these buildings.
- Now write, or sketch, your answer to the following question: *what does this building mean to you?*

Chapter Map

- Introduction: taking notice of buildings
- Why do cultural geographers study buildings?
- What are buildings – and what do they do?
- What are buildings made of?
- What happens in and around buildings?

4.1 Introduction: taking notice of buildings

In January 2008, one of the authors moved house. As a first-time buyer, he had no real idea of how this worked. With the prospect of parting with well-earned cash looming large, he had to learn about the process. For the first time, ever, he had to *know* a tremendous

amount about one of the most commonplace of built forms in the UK: a semi-detached (two-family) house. He had to know detailed things, such as:

- the precise dimensions of a new conservatory built by the previous owners, which might or might not have required planning permission;
- the odd activities prohibited by the vendors of the land on which the house was built (in 1959) – including a ban on keeping chickens;
- whether legal indemnification for missing guarantee certificates was required for the double-glazed windows;
- whether the cracks under the front window meant the house was slowly, inexorably, falling down (and many other seemingly insignificant, mundane details).

His experience should remind us that a building is not *just* a building. There are many different ways of seeing, feeling, being in, and writing about, buildings. This is even true for small family houses.

But this chapter is not simply about houses. It is about various types of architecture, both 'big' and 'small' (a distinction we discuss in the chapter). As the introductory exercise suggested, this chapter is about how geographers have constantly sought to question

the material spaces around us, and in particular those that we commonly call 'buildings' or 'architecture'. After discussing why geographers study buildings, the chapter introduces a range of approaches that geographers have used to answer three key questions about buildings:

- What are buildings?
- What are buildings made of?
- What happens in and around buildings?

In the process we explore some ways in which a geographical approach has extended understandings of the built environment, and how taking notice of buildings has enriched the work of cultural geographers.

4.2 Why do cultural geographers study buildings?

Buildings have been an object of study for geographers – especially cultural geographers – for nearly a century. Before we discuss how geographers have studied buildings, we want to take a moment to consider why this might be, and how this impulse has reflected broader work in cultural geography.

So why do cultural geographers study buildings? We want to highlight two key reasons, although you will come across many more if you read around the subject. First, and quite simply, the practice of architecture is one of place-making. This is the case from the small scale to the very large: from the family unit designing and building a shelter for themselves to the architect, contractors and builders involved in realising the largest skyscraper. Architecture is fundamentally about turning spaces into places, and/or turning places into other places. Architectural practice involves a massively complex combination of ideal designs and intentions with material technologies (bricks, windows, steel girders) to create what are often the very fundamental spaces in which we live our lives.

Second, following from this latter idea, buildings are the taken-for-granted spaces in which we spend a good proportion of our lives. Wherever we live, a large proportion of our lives is spent in, around, underneath or outside buildings. The context may vary, but the fact is that buildings are fundamental parts of our lives. Yet

we very often take them for granted – that is, unless we need to change them (as per our introduction), or mend them, or want to visit unusual examples. But a key part of cultural geography has been unpick, question and even problematise the spaces and places we most take for granted. As we shall see, buildings are massively complex places, and the geographical study of buildings combines work on technology, power relations, aesthetics and consumption. Scratching the surface, buildings are also at the centre of many debates that concern not just cultural geographers, but most of us – debates about the regeneration of city spaces, about the meaning of home, or about the value of public places such as the municipal library.

A final reason for undertaking geographical work on architecture is that buildings provide excellent case studies for the broader debates, issues and concepts that interest cultural geographers (see Chapter 1). For instance, in this chapter we shall outline how the mapping of building types across the United States was a key activity of the very first group of knowingly 'cultural geographers': the **Berkeley School**. Then we shall explore how new cultural geographers chose certain kinds of building (often large-scale, imposing, well-known urban landmarks) as key examples of the ways in which places could symbolise the political intentions of the rich and powerful. And we shall explore how, increasingly, cultural geographers have turned to buildings as some of the key sites at and with which we can explore how material spaces (walls, floors, corridors, rooms) interact with and produce bodily movements, feelings and meanings. First, though, we turn to the question of what we mean when we talk about buildings.

4.3 What are buildings – and what do they do?

In the scheme of things, buildings have received relatively little attention from human geographers. Perhaps this is because – like semi-detached houses, or the building you're in right now – it is easy to just take buildings for granted. Yet architecture is a fascinating topic for cultural geographers. A mixture of art and technology, architecture involves the designation

of boundaries, volumes, façades, movements – in short, the very process of *making a place*. Buildings are required to do many things – to house, to entertain, to incarcerate, or, like airports, to literally move people along corridors, through security gates, and into departure lounges (Adey 2008).

So the questions that give this section its subtitle are far from straightforward. In fact, the act of asking these questions is an important one. By so doing, we can open up what Jenkins (2002) calls the 'black box' of architecture. By this he means that, too often, a building is simply seen as a static, safe, material thing whose internal workings are opaque. We shall return to this point at the end of this section, because it is directed at earlier work by geographers – and others – on architecture. For now, though, bear in mind that it is this act of *questioning* buildings that has driven a number of cultural geographical engagements with architecture, specifically since the early twentieth century. So, we ask again: what are buildings – and what do they do?

• Early geographies of architecture

The earliest geographies of architecture formed part of the work of the **Berkeley School** (Chapter 1). Their work was concerned more broadly with the study of landscapes. Yet in their search for the unique forces that created a landscape, they turned to buildings. For them, a building could be defined quite simply. It was – like the roads, technologies and tools they also studied – an expression of a 'way of life'. As John Goss (1988) argued much later, buildings were 'cultural artefacts'. He states: "although constrained by environmental conditions and available construction materials, form and style in architecture reflect the level of technological development and the values of a culture" (Goss 1988: 393). Once buildings were viewed in this way, they could be mapped – and so could the unique culture that had produced them. In this way, Wilbur Zelinsky called for the study of vernacular architecture, such as agricultural barns, arguing that:

The many varieties of barns, sheds, wells, and other farmstead structures [ment] close attention. Enough work has been done on barns to indicate that they are perhaps the most conservative of structures in general use and

may serve quite as effectively as house types to indicate sources, routes and dates of settlers and the spatial outlines of culture areas. Distinctive barn types are common to the South, others to the Midland and French Canada. Much of older New England is characterised by the readily recognisable connecting barn.

(Zelinsky 1973: 100)

Finding little historical record of either barn types or design, Zelinsky (1958) documented how barns had been transplanted from central Germany to the eastern United States. He described the main characteristics of New England 'connecting barns' (barns connected to the main farmhouse) in terms of size, shape and construction. He then mapped 'frequent occurrences' of these barns, explaining differences in their construction by both climate and the influence of other cultural groups' building styles. Also part of the Berkeley School, Fred Kniffen (1965) undertook similar studies on vernacular or folk housing in the eastern United States. He mapped the distribution of different housing types, suggesting how particular architectural features (building materials, roofs) varied over space. For example, Figure 4.1 shows one map from Kniffen and Glassie's (1966) study of methods for building in wood across the eastern United States: the terms on the map refer to different methods for laying and interlocking horizontal logs in wooden buildings.

The work of the Berkeley School meant that architecture – even the architecture of barns and folk houses – would be taken seriously by geographers. This meant that, for the first time, geographers were paying attention to buildings as appropriate objects for geographical enquiry. Buildings were viewed as especially important, visible traces of different cultural groups, demonstrating historical influences as well as the interplay between culture and the environment as people had created settlements in the United States. This meant that mapping their distribution was a key way to understand the location and diffusion of different cultural groups.

Despite their popularity (which continues today), later cultural geographers criticised the Berkeley School's work on architecture (see Chapters 1 and 5). Chiefly, the Berkeley approach tended to simplify the definition and meaning of architecture such that it



Source: from Building in wood in the eastern United States, *Geographical Review*, 56, pp. 40-66 (Kniffen, F. and Glassie, H. 1996).

- **The new cultural geography: reading the symbolism of buildings**

During the 1980s, cultural geographers advanced studies that explored the symbolism of buildings.

In recognising the symbolism of buildings, geographers did three things (Box 4.2 provides a case study of these three things in action). First, they tried to get behind the description of built forms to explore why and how they looked the way they did. They tried to understand the economic imperatives that guided the size and location of a building/ They tried to understand the interests and ideologies guiding the 'personalities' behind a building, such as its owner and its architect (e.g. Gruffudd 2001).

Second, geographers demonstrated how buildings are not neutral containers for human action. Buildings – like other landscapes – can represent particular power relations (Dovey 1999). They can exclude some social groups and include others – either directly or indirectly. Imrie (2003) shows, for instance, how architects hold ‘ideal’ images about the human bodies that will inhabit their buildings. Rarely do architects think about the size, shape and especially dis/ability of the people using their buildings, and they may (perhaps inadvertently) exclude people who do not fit their ideal. Elsewhere, the gendered

Third, geographers revised the ways in which we see buildings. Rather than expressions of a cultural group, buildings could be viewed as **texts** (Chapter 6), representing the interests and power relations mentioned above. There were considerable disagreements about how those social, political and economic contexts were represented by buildings (compare Cosgrove 1997 with Duncan and Ley 1993; summarised by Lees 2001). Yet architecture was viewed as a kind of language (Goss 1988, 1993). Hence colours, shapes, symbols (whether religious, sporting, artistic, or historical) could literally be 'read' from a building, just as letters, words and common phrases make up what we usually understand to be a written text. The difference was that the architectural texts referred to different parts of a building, such as statues, columns or roof style. In turn, with a little training, geographers could look for particular meanings – be they political, cultural or historical – just as we learn to understand

What does 'your' building mean?



Think again about the building you are in or outside:

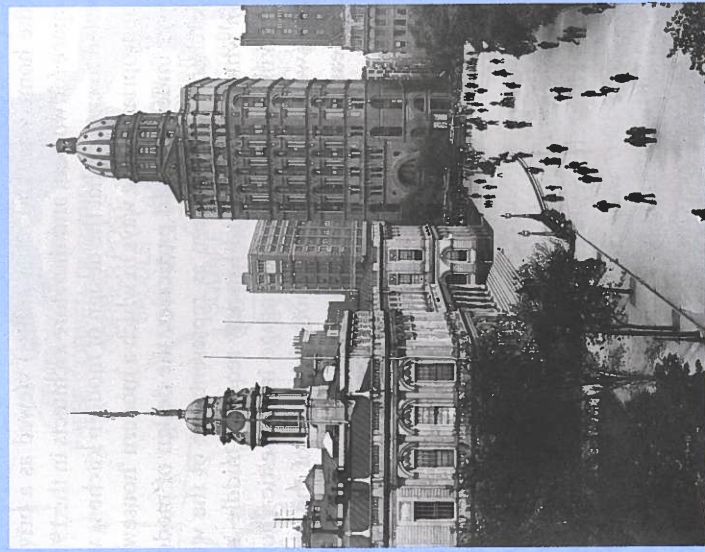
- Is there any decoration?
- Is it built in a recognisable 'style'?
- Does its size or shape convey anything beyond its use?
- Can you tell who built it (who its architect or owner is/was)?

Compare this building with some others you might have come across – religious buildings, shopping malls, skyscrapers. Perhaps these other buildings have more or less obvious messages to tell people who look at them.



Box 4.2

The New York World Building (from Domosh, 1989)



Photograph 4.1 The New York World Building.

Source: Corbis/Bettmann.

New cultural geographical approaches to architecture enabled geographers to focus on one particular landscape or building. Domosh's study of the New York World

Building (Photograph 4.1) was one of the first attempts to "rescue some of the meanings that are normally lost in functional analyses of skyscrapers" (Domosh 1989: 348). This early skyscraper, constructed in 1890s New York, was seen to represent a number of ideals around American literature and business endeavour.

Domosh does two main things in her analysis of the building. First, she places this newspaper building in the political-economic context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New York. She details how New York elites used their buildings as displays of ostentatious consumption, and how skyscrapers expressed economic power and growth through getting taller – much in a way that historically had been reserved for public or religious buildings. Second, Domosh explores the values expressed in the building's symbolism. These were related to the political-economic context of the city, but also to the aspirations of the building's owner, newspaper magnate Joseph Pulitzer. For him, the building should not merely reflect his economic power or the commercial success of the newspaper. Rather, its Renaissance arches and decoration were designed to express his civic pride in the city and his passion for public service.

For Domosh (1989: 350), both of these "layers and types of explanation" were critical to understanding the functional and the symbolic elements of Pulitzer's concerns and prevailing class-based conditions of late nineteenth-century New York. The New York World Building could be understood only in terms of these elements.

the meaning behind political slogans, advertisements or fictional novels. Looking at the façade of a building – at its different symbols like letters and phrases – allowed one to read off the intentions of its architect, and the broader socio-political context of its making (Box 4.2 provides an example of what we mean by this).

An approach that looks at the symbolism of buildings is especially important, because it tells us whose interests are served by a building (for instance those of a multinational corporation or a political party). This approach also helps us to look behind *who* creates a

extraordinary) references to other places as diverse as New York, Egypt and Venice. In this case, casino owners use symbolism to distract consumers from the true purpose of their buildings; but they also do so to display the glitz, glamour and lure of their casino above their competitors.

In most cases (apart from Las Vegas), buildings often seem too everyday to be remarked upon. But this approach teaches us that, if we look behind the façade, we can uncover and explore all kinds of political debates, tensions and problems that go into the very making of places – if you like, the literal material creation of 'human' geographies.

As indicated above, the symbolic approach to architecture has been pigeonholed as part of the new cultural geography of the 1980s. As a result, many of the **criticisms of new cultural geography** can also be applied to the textual or symbolic approach to architecture. These criticisms are outlined in Section 1.4. However, we want to point out one important critique of the symbolic approach to architecture. That is, quite simply, that architectural geographers had missed out a good deal of what architecture is, means, and does (Lees 2001). For Jenkins (2002), then, the 'black box' of architecture had not yet been opened out by these two groups of scholars. For him, "[t]hey all treat the individual building as a blank canvas on which another discourse is illustrated" – the processes of constructing, inhabiting and maintaining a building as *this* building (not another) are simply assumed (Jenkins 2002: 225). In other words, geographers have tended to focus on the meanings of what buildings do – but in so doing, they have missed out both on how buildings are constructed and on the many ways a building is used after it is officially completed.

We began this section by asking what a building was, and what a building could do. Jenkins' (2002) phrase "a blank canvas" neatly summarises how many geographers have understood buildings as something that symbolises something else – either a culture, in the case of the Berkeley School, or a set of political or cultural ideals, in the case of new cultural geographers. But this is *not* the end of the question of 'what a building can do': we shall return to that question later in this chapter. The next two sections explain cultural geographers' attempts to overcome

the missing elements in the architectural geographies being written by the Berkeley School and new cultural geographers. The literature covered in the next two sections should be interpreted as *building* on that earlier work – you will recognise elements of both approaches in what follows.

4.4 What are buildings made of?

As our introduction indicated, when one of the authors moved into his new house, he became obsessed with questions about windows, cracks, paving slabs and the other material things that make up a house. His anxieties remind us of the reliance of human beings – and human geographies – on **material things** (Chapter 10). Clearly, buildings also rely on material things. Think for instance of the many properties of bricks that make them such useful blocks from which to make low-rise buildings. Think (perhaps for the first time) about the properties of concrete that mean it can be moulded into sinuous curves – for example in multi-storey car parks. Or, think (again, probably for the first time) about the properties of steel that make it an ideal skeleton for tall buildings. Certainly, after the 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center towers, many commentators were struck by how certain configurations of certain material things (and certain forces) could bring about the destruction of a building. All of this should set you thinking: what are buildings made of, and what actually holds a building together so that it looks like a piece of architecture?

Having criticised the Berkeley School above – and having said that an interest in material things is a recent one for cultural geographers – it is instructive to briefly revisit the work of Zelinsky, Kniffen, Sauer and others. This is because these early cultural geographers were, principally, interested in the material manifestations of 'culture' in the landscape. Their work may have been limited – it was certainly biased towards rural regions of North America, and by present-day measures was theoretically thin (Goss 1988; Lees 2001). Yet they ascribed great value to everyday landscapes, and to simple material artefacts, much in the ways an ethnographer still might. They allowed for

the very study of things such as barns – their different façades, their connection to homesteads, their shape, the type of wood or metal from which they were made. They began the process of inscribing them with cultural meaning for geographical study – even if that meaning and its socio-political context were rather bare. Their work should also be read in a North American academic context, where settlement geographers were struggling to assert the validity of non-indigenous North American settlement patterns against the far longer sweep of European history. Thus vernacular architecture and folk artefacts became a key set of resources for the development of North American cultural geographies. Put simply: the material bits and pieces that made up barns and folk housing were made to *matter*.

● Globalisation and 'global' cultures of housing

As might be guessed from the introduction to this section, we can say much more about the bits and pieces that make buildings what they are. We shall call this the 'materiality' of architecture. Significantly – like our introduction – much of this work has focused in one way or another on homes and housing.

We begin with the seminal work of Anthony King (1984, 2004). King's enduring interest has been on placing built forms at the centre of contemporary theorising about globalisation, postcolonialism and modernity. As King himself states in the preface to his *Spaces of Global Cultures* (2004: xvi), he is concerned with 'architectural and building cultures as they are affected by transnational processes'. His is a work of *flows* around the globe – of people, ideas, forms and materials – which then take local forms (compare with Ian Cook's work, explored in Chapter 10). There is therefore a constant interchange of scaled effects. The global makes the local, and vice versa (Massey 2005); crucially, this is all happening through the very process of architectural forms being built in different places. Famously, King illustrated his earlier arguments with the seemingly ubiquitous form of the bungalow (King 1984). He demonstrated that the bungalow was a hybrid form, taking on particular shapes and characteristics as it was internationalised via particular institutions and professional

actors (architects and planners). So a bungalow in Kent, England, could look, feel and mean something very different from one in New Delhi, India. Yet both those countries – and therefore both those forms – were linked by the processes of colonialism, the internationalisation of architectural practice and the building technologies proffered in those two contexts.

Jacobs (2006) argues that King's work is significant when compared with that of the Berkeley School because, unlike the Berkeley School, King does not simply use a building as an example of, or proxy for, a cultural group or cultural region, ready to be mapped. Rather, he picks apart the different elements of the forms that were being mapped. It is, effectively, a step back, and a step closer. It is a step back: a critical questioning of how built forms emerge in the first place (which can *then* be mapped, or 'read'). It is a step closer: an in-depth examination of the planning procedures, flows of information, and types of material technology that constitute those built forms and make them identifiable as buildings of particular styles. These are both crucial steps if we are to fully understand how buildings matter in terms of their making at different, interlinked spatial scales. While our own homes might feel unique, they share certain components, certain assumptions and certain laws with many other homes, sometimes in some pretty unlikely places.

● New cultural geography: political-economic approaches to architecture

We consider more recent work in this vein in a moment. But first we want to pause to consider again the work of new cultural geographers. If you remember, we suggested earlier that their work involved moving on from a common approach to 'reading' symbols from architectural façades. In particular, a number of these geographers were concerned with what we might term the 'historical-material' conditions that produced a building. You may come across the term 'historical-material' in relation to Marxism – and this is no coincidence. Significantly, Marxism is not simply about class relations or class struggle, but about the value, control and ownership of material

things, at particular times, in particular places. This approach to material things can more broadly be labelled a 'political-economic' one.

In political-economic analyses, buildings can, with some care, be considered material things with ascribed values, and with (often emotionally charged) struggles over their ownership. For example, some parts of David Harvey's (1973) seminal *Social Justice and the City* are concerned with the location and ownership of housing in cities with respect to different socio-economic classes. Harvey's arguments about class and social difference have informed the ways in which many cultural geographers have studied how landscapes may include the views of some (privileged, mainstream groups) while excluding others (in Harvey's case, the working classes). Geographies of architecture have been no different, and in fact have provided some excellent examples of political-economic approaches to culture (e.g. Mitchell 2000).

Take the housing market as an example of the above point. It represents the locally variable system of buying and selling homes that involves valuation, real estate agents and mortgages, and which was deemed to be at the centre of a global financial crisis (generally considered to have started in 2008). The housing market could be viewed as a key 'circuit' in the accumulation of capital. But in thinking about the geography of architecture, Goss (1988) develops Harvey's point, arguing that buildings be viewed as commodities because they can be bought and sold. But houses are more than simply parts of a system of buying and selling, because they gain value in other ways. For Goss, the value of a building is not simply determined by the price of the land it sits on or by some relevant planning laws, but also draws on a range of cultural practices typical of globalising consumer cultures (Chapter 3).

The cultural processes that Goss cites – such as advertising – provide houses with cultural meanings additional to their simple economic value. So the designers of exclusive 'gated' housing use architectural design (symbolism), advertising, leisure pursuits (golf, water sports, tennis courts) and the promise of security to persuade their target market to move in (Till 1993; Al-Hindi and Stadder 1997; Phillips 2002). Just like any other consumer product (such as a car

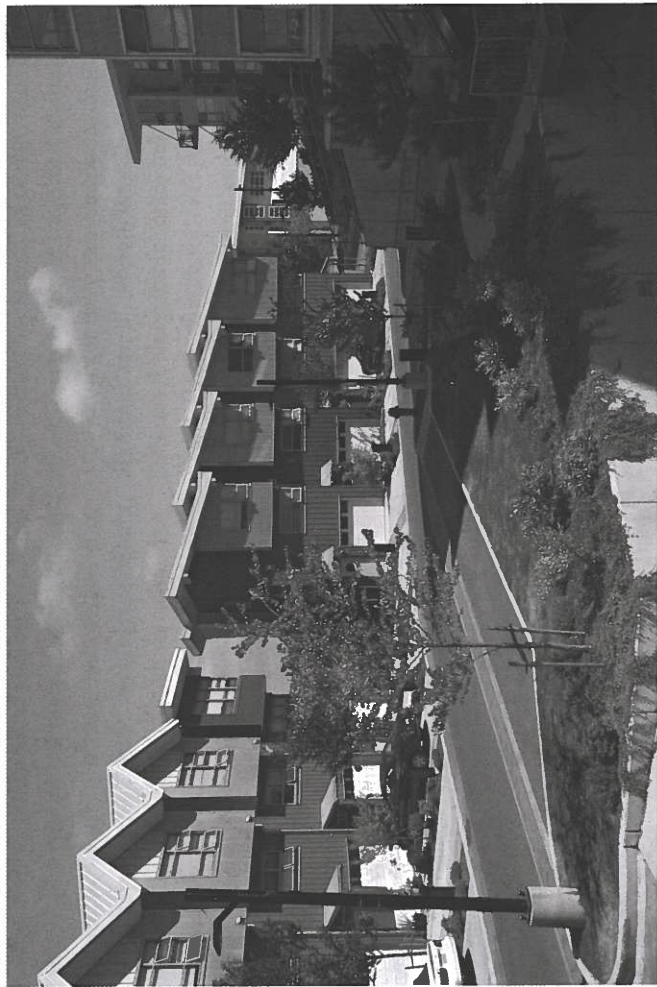
or a new gadget), this turns houses into commodified objects surrounded by carefully planned images and stories that aim to persuade consumers to buy them. Sometimes estate agents even try to associate particular kinds of lifestyle (e.g. retirement or 'traditional village life') with a newly planned community (Till 1993). If successful, these images and stories may influence the value of a property – just like the planning laws and land values that also affect the value of a piece of real estate.

In a slightly different way, David Ley (1993) used a political-economic approach to stress the relationship between cooperative housing *designs* and the *historical-material conditions* under which cooperative social formations were possible in 1980s Vancouver (Photograph 4.2). By 'historical-material conditions,' we refer to the kinds of economic, social and political context (local and global) that allowed groups of residents to come together against the grain of capitalist processes such as gentrification.

Ley provides a more optimistic reading of post-modern capitalism that allows for alternative social formations, many of which remain able to express their communal (shared) visions through built forms. Ley explores how the kinds of house they built – their design, layout, legal ownership – directly expressed the shared values of these alternative groups. Ley's work is an excellent example of a cultural geography of architecture that *combines* the 'textual' approach to symbols with an in-depth analysis of the political-economic, material conditions through which certain types of building are allowed to flourish.

● But what are buildings made of? Actor-network theory and the 'materiality' of architecture

Most recently, geographers have re-engaged with the materiality of architecture through actor-network theory (see Chapter 10). While the approaches above provide a pretty comprehensive framework for studying buildings, there is, it seems, still more we can say about the role of material objects in architecture. There is also more to say about buildings as material, technical achievements that are part of the kinds of network and flow that King writes about so eloquently.



Photograph 4.2 The design of cooperative housing in Vancouver. The architect wanted this 60-unit structure to be 'memorable', 'a good neighbour', 'a source of pride'. 'The gables and clapboard (in powder blue) [reflect] ... nearby older houses, the postmodern [elements reflect] ... new town houses in this gentrified district; ... roof gardens and false chimneys [are] part of the iconography of "home"'. Source: Ley (1993: 140). Alamy Images/Mike Dobel.

This, of course, brings us back to the question of what a building is and what it does. As Jenkins (2002) argues, an actor-network approach to buildings questions the given materiality of a building. It questions the feeling we have that a building has always been there, and always will be. As Dewsbury (2000) notes, as other material things decompose or wear down, even buildings are falling down, however slowly!

Actor-network theory actually requires us to ask two questions about buildings. First – and we have already considered this in some depth – what is it that makes a building a building? Second, how and why do buildings become included in our lives? Another way of framing this second question is to ask how buildings become enmeshed in social relations such that they become acceptable, usable, and a part of our lives that almost fades into the background (for some people this is the hallmark of a 'good' building). The trick is to try to answer

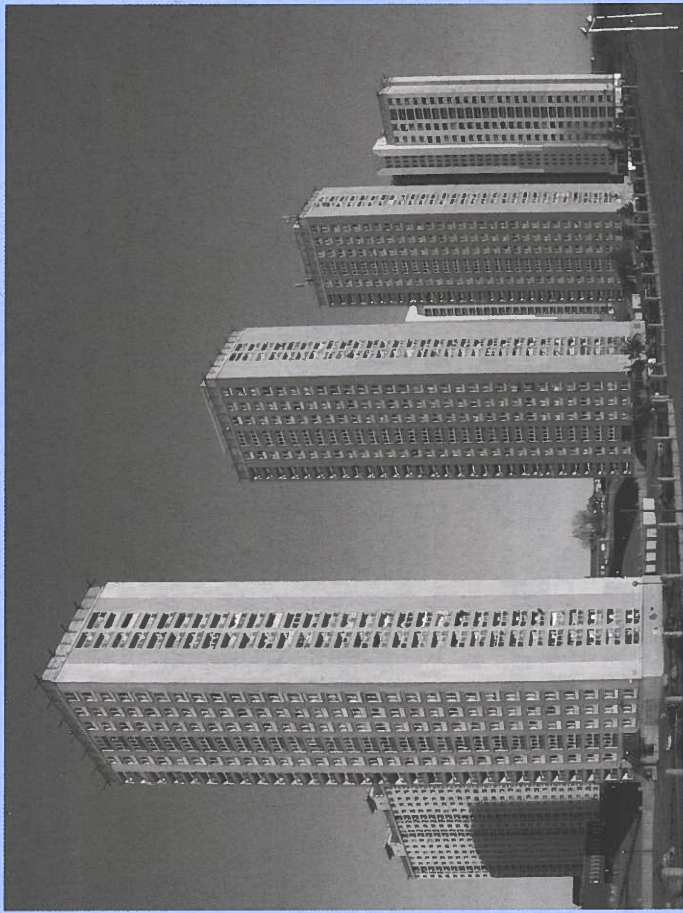
both of these questions together, all the time. Rather than consider a house as simply a technical achievement, or view a house in the context of the particular political-economic conditions that surround it, we have to try to do both together. Jacobs (2006) labels this a 'socio-technical' approach to buildings, since it combines social processes with technical processes, and does not prioritise one or the other in advance. Notably, geographers have, in the past, tended to prioritise social processes over technical processes when writing about architecture.

Jacobs' (2006) work promises to help us rethink what we mean by buildings, and how we even *start* to write geographies of architecture (see Box 4.3 for a case study of her work). What she terms the 'thingness' of a building (Jacobs 2006: 11) – what makes a building self-evidently *this* building – should not simply be assumed. It is an achievement. Many things, people, laws and practices have had to go right for it



Box 4.3

Buildings as 'socio-technical' achievements



Photograph 4.3 Red Road high rise block, Glasgow.

Source: Alamy Images/John Peter Photography.

Jane Jacobs' (2006) and colleagues' (Jacobs *et al.* 2007) work on tall buildings has been instrumental in helping geographers to think again about architecture. She explores the rise (pardon the pun) of super-tall housing blocks – using the example of Red Road in Glasgow (Photograph 4.3).

Jacobs tries to rethink what makes a building, in a number of ways. For example, she argues that residential towers can be seen as socio-technical achievements. That is, they proffer new combinations of social relationships with technologies. So these combinations provide new ways of removing garbage, dealing with noisy neighbours, or doing the washing. This means that buildings are not just big, amorphous blocks of concrete. Instead, they are held together by all sorts of complex, seemingly mundane relationships between people and bits of technology. Some of these technologies were new when Red Road was built (in the 1960s) – technologies such as lifts, windows and garbage-removal systems. Each technology has its own story to tell – but only in taking part in the story of the

building and the people who built and inhabited it. Hence a set of stories about washing, or about windows, that combine personal histories with detailed understandings of the technologies themselves.

Another key contribution of Jacobs' work is to challenge the ways in which we understand the impact of buildings on people's lives. Many of us assume that the shape, form and layout of a building can control our actions. But Jacobs argues for a different way of thinking about the relationship between people and buildings. In particular, buildings are often viewed as being 'just there', in the background. They are seen as an undeniable and unchanging part of our lives – a 'black box'. Instead, every building, Jacobs argues, has a 'turbulent' history. There are disagreements about how it should be built, the legal decisions surrounding it, and the technologies to be used – especially in such innovative buildings as Red Road. Quite simply – and this is the neat thing – we need to open out the 'black box'. This means that we can look again at what makes a building a building – at the controversies,

Box 4.3 continued

personalities and sheer work involved in turning a pile of bricks and steel into what we term (and assume to be) a 'residential high-rise'. In other words, Jacobs argues, doing

this allows us to find out what are the 'claims' made about a socio-technical collective that mean it simply becomes a more-or-less stable part of our lives.

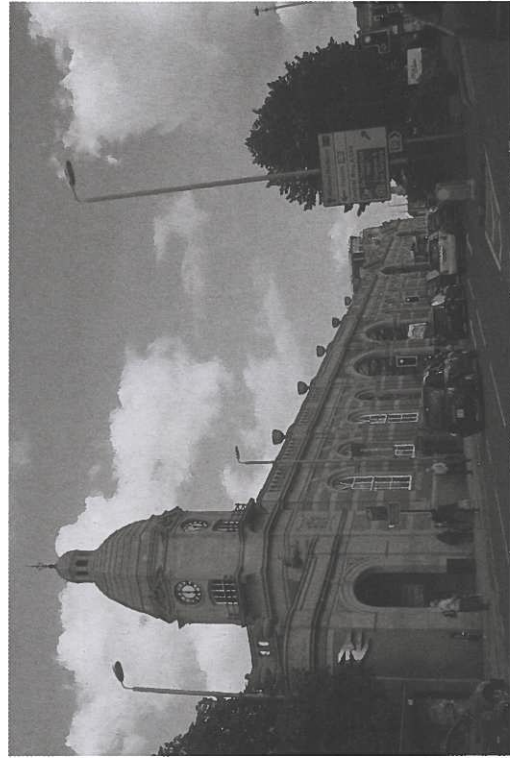
to get to the point of even being finished. Similarly, when buying a house, many things, people, laws and practices have to go right for that house to become *labelled* as *my* house, my home, my bit of architecture. To be sure, we can then also involve in our discussions the symbolisms that add to my house *becoming* my house – perhaps by thinking about the colour I have painted my garage door. But we must, in effect, cast the net much wider. Only then we can begin to think (Box 4.3) about how all the messy and complex things that end up (usually deliberately) at one site can be claimed as 'architecture' (Jacobs 2006).

Think again about the building you're in, or outside. If it is a library, what particular *claims* have to be made to make it a library? Or, to put it another way, what changes (to what happens inside, to certain laws, to its layout, to its contents, to its form) would have

to occur before the library became a bookshop ... or a factory ... or a block of flats? We've come back – again – to the very question with which we started this chapter. So one of the key ways in which cultural geographers approach architecture is *still* to keep on asking: what is architecture, and what can it do? Finding out what buildings are made of is just part of this process.

4.5 What happens in and around buildings?

Take a look at Photograph 4.4. It is a railway station. Using a Berkeley School approach, we could consider whether and how this design of railway station is distributed regionally (in this case, in the English



Photograph 4.4 Leicester railway station, UK.

Source: Dr Sophie Hadfield-Hill.

What happens in and around buildings?

East Midlands). Using a symbolic/textual approach, we could try to read the station's interior, façades, its layout and its style to uncover the intentions of its architect or the types of bodies that might pass through. Using a material approach, we could unpick which technologies 'made it' in the original construction and the ongoing refurbishment/maintenance of this station in the contexts of changing train usage in the UK.

Using each of the approaches outlined so far in this chapter, then, we could build three quite distinct, but overlapping, geographies of this scene. Let us be clear: we could *never* write a 'complete' geography for this railway station. But we are missing one ingredient: the practices that we call the 'inhabitation' of buildings. Advocates of both the political-economic (e.g. Ley 1993) and materialist (e.g. Jacobs 2006) approaches to architecture promote attention to the daily practices that are also key to giving buildings their meanings. They both highlight that **bodily practices** (Chapter 12) of being in a building matter – using it, walking through it, sitting in it, redesigning it, cleaning it, or pretty much whatever *you* are doing *now* in your chosen building.

The reasons for thinking about 'what happens' in and around buildings – the title of this section – are fourfold. Bear in mind as you navigate these four reasons that although this section appears last in the chapter, it does not mean that an interest in the practices of inhabitation is the most recent area of research in architectural geography. Indeed, some of the reasons we are about to list stretch back to correspond with the relatively early days of the Berkeley School's research.

First of all, geographers have – quite naturally – not been the only ones with an interest in architecture and built spaces more generally. A quite diverse set of philosophers, architects and urban theorists have tried to understand the complex ways in which people use built spaces. Many of these characters – from Walter Benjamin to the Situationists – are considered elsewhere in this book. So let us take a couple of examples that seem to be cited quite often in geographical texts about not only architecture, but also built forms. Notably, each draws out the practices of **everyday geographies** (Chapter 9) as a creative force

within society that can disrupt the dominant ways in which powerful groups (big business, politicians, planners, famous architects) intend the public to use buildings. For instance, Michel de Certeau (1984) asks us to contrast the view of life from the top of a Manhattan skyscraper with the hustle and bustle on the street below. He argues that the 'stories' created by thousands of footsteps on the ground are far more meaningful than those of the grand stories told about cities by politicians. More recently, Iain Borden, Jane Rendell and others (Borden *et al.* 2001) have tried to rewrite architectural histories from the viewpoint of the diverse people and practices that move through and reside in buildings, rather than from the 'official' stories that architects and historians tell about buildings. The fascination with the everyday life of buildings – think of it a little like idle gossip – is an enduring one. But it is one that simply allows us to become aware of the diverse ways in which 'ordinary' people use, think about, experience and feel buildings when they are in them. This impulse – which is a political one more than anything else – also allows cultural geographers to listen to a much greater range of stories about buildings, often from marginalised groups such as the homeless, whose voices are not often heard in academic research (Lees 2001).

Second, geographers have reminded us that everyday life means so much more than idle gossip; or, rather, they have demonstrated how *even* such things as idle gossip, or the interpersonal encounters that happen in a coffee shop, are hugely significant (Laurier and Philo 2006a, 2006b). For an interest in everyday life has also meant an interest in what is often termed the **consumption** of places (see Chapter 3). A coffee shop, for instance, is not just a place where we go to consume coffee, but a place that – with its clever design, its smells, its atmosphere – we go to consume. The difference is a relatively subtle one. We consume a place itself – just, as we noted in the previous section, as we can market a place or sell it. The most obvious example of the way in which we can consume a place is an enduring one for cultural geographers – how, when on holiday, mass tourists simply seem to 'collect' photographs and images of places rather than spend time experiencing them at length (Urry 1995). So a

place – including a building – can be produced, sold, marketed, and now consumed.

A focus on consumption shifts attention from the **production** of a building (the materials, symbols and contexts of its making; see also Chapter 2) to how people use it as part of their everyday life. Perhaps we should not assume a ready distinction between production and consumption – and perhaps we should not read the consumption of a building exactly like that of a tin of soup. The point is, though, that consumption is both a practice that matters, and one that, significantly, produces its own meanings. This allows Lees (2001) to suggest yet another move beyond reading the symbolism of buildings like a text. She says that “if we are to concern ourselves with the inhabitation of architectural space as much as its signification . . . we must [also] engage . . . actively with the situated and everyday practices through which built environments are used” (Lees 2001: 56). Lees describes how a number of cultural geographers interested in consumption have explored the meanings that people make of everyday consumer objects – such as the personal stereo (Bull, 2000). In the same way, cultural geographers can explore how people ‘consume’ buildings – both by asking (intervening) inhabitants or users about their experiences of being in buildings, and by observing the kinds of things that people do in them.

Lees uses observations to create a series of notebook vignettes. She recounts some of the many uses of a public library in Vancouver – some unexpected – by newspaper readers, vagrants, and playing children. Her work has inspired others to explore how people make their own meanings from schools (Kraftl 2006a, 2006b) and blocks of houses (Llewellyn 2004). So, Lees urges geographers to look both at the meanings that ‘ordinary people’ make of buildings, and at the things they do in them. In doing so, they do not just look at how people ‘consume’ buildings, but at the kinds of bodily practices they perform there – what kinds of movement, activity and bodily sensation a building allows. This approach therefore provides a further example of the many cultural geographies of the body that we discuss elsewhere in this book.

Third, some geographers have drawn on a recent interest in **emotion** and **affect** (Chapter 11) to explore how the meanings that people attach to buildings are not always or easily expressed in words (Rose *et al.* 2010). Certain buildings – like the home you come from – have many sentimental meanings attached to them. This is, partly, because so many memorable things have happened there – so many embodied practices have given rise to so many memories. You may look back and laugh. Or, if you are less fortunate, you may look upon your home as a place of incarceration, trouble or misery. During the 1970s, humanist geographers (Chapter 5) tried to explore what it is about places that makes us love or hate them (Tuan 1977). They used poetry, film, literature and a whole range of other artistic devices to understand why particular places provoked emotional reactions. Very often, they focused on buildings, especially those ‘traditional’ types that evoke shared meanings in a nation’s history (traditional homesteads, for instance). Very recently, architectural geographers have tried to understand how architects *and* users of buildings manipulate built spaces to deliberately create certain emotions among other users. They have focused on the manipulation of certain ‘homely’ atmospheres in schools for young children, and on the creation of calm places in airports (Kraftl and Adey 2008; also Adey 2008).

Finally, this recent work on affect reminds us that practices of inhabitation do not take place *after* a building has been ‘finished’. Some people – including many architects – argue that a building is never finished, and that we should embrace the idea that it is always incomplete (Lerup 1977). Rather, the process of building is a much more complex, related form of negotiation between the ‘builders’ and the ‘users’. Therefore, if we combine Jacobs’ (2006) arguments with those of Lees (2001), we see that we need to constantly revise our ideas not only about what makes this or that building what it is, but also about what kinds of inhabitation are made possible by the building in combination with its architect and its users. It is not as simple as saying that people inhabit buildings. Buildings and people produce various forms of inhabitation, *together*. So buildings are an

effect of all the things that make them up (including inhabitation). And inhabitation is just one effect of the building!

Take again the building you’re in, and consider what you’re doing right *now*. What else could you do, at this building? Being honest, and being realistic,

what types of thing are likely to happen in the next five minutes in your building? Now look back at all the things we’ve considered in this chapter and think about *why* your building means that only certain things are likely to happen. Is it design? Is it the people around you? Is it just a feeling you get?

Summary

- Geographies of architecture ask us to question buildings in new ways. Buildings often seem to be ‘just there’ – but since the early twentieth century, geographers have provided a number of ways to show how they are not simply ‘just there’.
- Early approaches to architecture (Berkeley School) tried to describe and map the characteristics of particular types of building – such as barns and folk houses.
- Symbolic approaches to architecture were diverse, but involved ‘reading’ the façades of buildings like ‘texts’. Then the hidden meanings, histories and political contexts of a building could be uncovered. Sometimes those contexts could then be challenged by geographers with those people who lived in (or could not live in) those buildings.
- Materialist approaches to architecture do two things. On the one hand, they remind us of the importance of material things in our everyday lives – and of the political economies that structure our lives. On the other hand, they remind us that buildings combine social and technical factors equally; if we disentangle these factors we can rethink what makes a building a building!
- Approaches stressing everyday practice remind us that people make their own meanings with – and feel differently about – the buildings they live in and with. It is important to find out about these meanings and emotions in order to challenge the view that buildings are ‘just there’, and that architecture finishes when the builders leave.

Some key readings

Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation*, Routledge, London.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide examples of a political-economic ‘reading’ of buildings – in this case housing. This has become a seminal text, because it not only provides an example of treating buildings as ‘texts’, but also allows for a consideration of the political contexts surrounding buildings, and the everyday practices of ‘ordinary’ people who use them.

Lees, L. (2001) Towards a critical geography of architecture: the case of an ersatz colosseum. *Ecumene*, 8(1), 51–86.

Lees calls for a geography of architecture that pays greater attention to people’s embodied practices. She uses vignettes from ethnographic observations to explore the many conflicting meanings made by users of a public library in Vancouver. Note that the journal is now called *Cultural Geographies*.

Jacobs, J. (2006) A geography of big things. *Cultural Geographies*, 13, 1–27.

This is an example of how a materialist or actor-network theory approach can be applied to buildings. Jacobs advocates looking at the social and the technical equally, so that we can

unpick the ways in which a building gets built – and the ways in which people make claims about and for ‘architecture’.

Kraftl, P. and Adey P (2008) Architecture/affect/inhabitation: geographies of being-in buildings. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 98, 213–231.

This paper provides an example of how emotional geographies are built, controlled and managed in buildings. It uses case studies from school architecture and airport architecture, and

shows how both designers and users are part of the ongoing ways in which a building can move people.

Zelinsky, W. (1973) *The Cultural Geography of the United States*, Prentice Hall, London.

An example of cultural geography using a Berkeley School approach. Browse the index to find examples of the ways in which housing, barns and other vernacular buildings are treated using this approach.



Landscapes

Before you read this chapter ...

Look at Photograph 5.1.

- What does the image show?
- What does the image mean?
- Do you think the image is 'accurate'?

- Does the image hide anything?
 - How does it make you feel?
- Can you answer all the above questions just by looking at the image?



Photograph 5.1 The Grand Canyon, Arizona.

Source: Peter Kraftl.